

MARXIST ATHEISM AND RELIGIONLESS CHRISTIANITY

A Combined Study of the Classical Marxist Critique of Religion
and
Bonhoeffer's Critique of Religion

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Donald Blanchard Abbott
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**There are two kinds of atheism,
one of which is the purification
of the concept of God.**

---Simone Weil

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MARXIST "NO!" TO RELIGION: A Psycho-Social Critique	1
II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE MARXIST "NO!"	17
The Young Hegelian Legacy	20
The Internal Support	28
III. BONHOEFFER'S "NO!" TO RELIGION	37
The Legacy of Karl Barth	40
Analysis of the Letters	51
IV. CONCLUSION	72
Points of Convergence	73
The Prospects for Dialogue	79
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

PREFACE

The prospects for dialogue among Christians and Communists have never been very auspicious because both parties generally have tended to consider each other as mortal enemies. Today there are no signs of a significant change in this overall tendency. Yet, there are some indications of initiatives into dialogue which may eventually transform this perennial, hostile deadlock into some form of creative and healthy co-existence.

One such indication is the remarkable, award-winning film released last year, Gospel According to St. Matthew; this movie is written and directed by an Italian Marxist, contains a non-professional cast composed largely of Communist party members, and is dedicated to "the dear ¹ memory of Pope John." Of even greater interest is the fact that last year Pope Paul VI extended the open-spirited tone of Pope John's encyclical Pacem in Terris by establishing a Vatican Secretariat for Non-believers to organize dialogue with atheists, including Communists. Already, there have been symposiums involving Marxist and Christian intellectuals in Frankfort, Salzburg, and Prague. Furthermore, Roger Garaudy, the leading theoretician of the French Communist party, has just published a book entitled De

¹Gunnar D. Kumlien, "A Marxist Christ," Commonweal, vol. LXXXII, no. 15, July 2, 1965, p. 471.

l'Anathème au Dialogue (From Anathema to Dialogue). in which he answers the appeal from Vatican II with a statement of the necessity for and the possibilities of genuine dialogue. His views are grounded in the following conviction: "The future of man cannot be constructed either against religious believers or even without them; the future of man cannot be built either against the Communists or even without them."² These are just a few of the most recent signs of an interest in dialogue among Christians and Communists. Whether or not they lead to a major change in Christian-Communist relations remains to be seen, for the political barriers are just as complex as the philosophical and theological ones, if not even more so.

This study is offered as a small contribution to the recent trend toward interest in Christian-Communist dialogue. It includes a combined analysis of the original Marxist polemic against religion, as set forth by Marx and Engels, and of the critique of religion made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his prison letters. It is written with the conviction that such a combined analysis can be helpful in setting the stage for fruitful dialogue.

The limited scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed treatment of Bonhoeffer's earlier writings. I would have liked to analyze the development of his "religionless"

²Roger Garaudy, De l'Anathème au Dialogue. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1965), p. 12.

ideas prior to their formulation in his letters. His later thought, though often expressed in radically new ways, was not a total departure from the theology of his earlier work. I agree with those who point to the continuous Christological thread in his thought -- particularly Eberhard Bethge, John Godsey, Martin Marty, and William Hamilton. Chapter III attempts to show that Bonhoeffer's critique of religion was intimately tied to this interest. This focus had been a central concern throughout his writings; his later formulations were the natural extension of his earlier Christology. This is a thesis to which an entirely separate study should be devoted.³ I state it here at the outset, however, for the consideration of the reader who might view Bonhoeffer's thought in his prison letters to be evidence of a complete break with his former theology and who therefore might dismiss it as either heretical or inconsequential.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to all those

³ There is a very recent publication which could prove to be solid substantiation for this thesis: Christ the Center (Harper & Row, 1966), a reconstruction of some lectures on Christology delivered by Bonhoeffer in 1933 at the University of Berlin. E.H. Robertson's introduction to these lectures is particularly pertinent. He states:

...a theologian will often assume what he has already written and leave his later writings to add to his earlier rather than replace them. There is clear evidence that Bonhoeffer is one of these ... Bonhoeffer's attitude to christology in 1933 was not annulled by later thought or experience. It remained the basis of his thinking about Christ (p. 11).

who have supported me in this work: especially The Rev. Joseph F. Fletcher, Professor of Christian Social Ethics at the Episcopal Theological School, whose keen interest and stimulating insights have continually driven me back to "first principles"; Joanna Kennedy, who so patiently and efficiently typed this manuscript; and Betsy, who has given to me in so many ways the strength without which this study would never have been completed.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MARXIST "NO!" TO RELIGION:

A Psycho-Social Critique

It is a well-known fact that Marx and Engels flatly rejected anything and everything having to do with religion. It is also a well-known fact that they believed this rejection to be an essential component of absolute significance in their system of thought. Nowhere has this fact been more succinctly stated by Marx than in his famous statement that the "criticism of religion is the premise of ¹ all criticism." The critique of religion was not an incidental addendum to their thought which you could either take or leave as you saw fit. Rather, it rested at the very heart of their system, and it could admit no compromise whatsoever. Theirs was a total rejection of religion which was unequivocally final.

These are facts which cannot be denied. Both Communists and Christians today are fully aware of them, and herein lies one of the major barriers which stand in the way of fruitful dialogue among these peoples. The lines are clearly drawn: Marxism is a deadly enemy to the Christian, and Christianity is no less an adversary to the Marxist. This is an unfortunate circumstance because by accepting the classical Marxist critique of religion at face value, both sides suffer from myopic vision. By failing to look any further into the Marxist critique,

¹ Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," On Religion, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), p. 42.

the Christian is unable to recognize how justified it is. To him, Marxism remains the Anti-Christ, who must be combatted at all costs.² Similarly, the Marxist, by failing to look beyond many of the 19th century arguments against religion typified in the writings of Marx and Engels, is unable to recognize the shortcomings of the use of such arguments well into the third quarter of the 20th century. To him, God obviously is a figment of man's imagination because the cosmonauts have not seen him during their celestial sojourns. In both camps there is a woeful lack of understanding of what Marx and Engels meant when they said "No!" to religion.

Because of this inadequacy both sides remain in sharply polarized opposition, regarding each other as threats to

²The way in which this brand of militant anti-Communism in America has been closely allied with right-wing politics has been described quite aptly by Richard Hofstadter in "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited --1965," The Paranoid Style in American Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 74.

"Under the aegis of right-wing politics, rigid Protestants of a type once intensely anti-Catholic can now unite with Catholics of similar militancy in a grand ecumenical zeal against communism and in what they take to be a joint defense of Christian civilization. The malevolent energy formerly used in the harassment of Catholics can now be more profitably spent in the search for Communists, or even in attacks on the alleged subversiveness of liberal Protestant denominations. The Manichean conception of life as a struggle between absolute good and absolute evil and the idea of an irresistible Armageddon have been thinly secularized and transferred to the cold war. The conflict between Christianity and communism is conceived as a war to the death, and Christianity is set forth as the only adequate counterpoise to the communist credo."

their individual existence, thereby failing to see that they have any viable alternative other than gradually to overwhelm and ultimately to defeat the other enemy camp. In the interest of uncovering channels for constructive discussions among Christians and Communists, it is of the utmost importance to isolate the key substance of the original Marxist critique of religion.

At the outset, the obvious must be affirmed: this critique was not fashioned in a vacuum. Marx and Engels built their system in response to the mid-19th century condition of man while drawing upon a rich philosophical legacy in Europe. What they said in opposition to religion was directly aimed at the ills and injustices of the ecclesiastical structures and practices of the times. Furthermore, their brand of atheistic thinking stood in a very significant relationship to the anti-religious thought within Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries.

In this regard, two realities were of striking prominence. First, religion was considered at that time as the affair of the "interior man"; it was purely a "private matter." As such, it had no vital relevance on the social level. It was in no way a hindrance to the operations of the capitalist bosses who were gaining wealth and position in Germany and England. It had nothing to say about the oppression and injustices done to the workers in the burgeoning industrial society. There was no social extension of religious life, and religion, therefore, possessed little,

if anything, that even faintly resembled prophetic action within society. Secondly, from the other side, atheism as well was a private matter. It was solely a phenomenon among the aristocratic intellectuals. Certainly much atheistic thinking had been constructed during the 18th century, particularly in France and Germany, but it resided entirely in the minority circle of enlightened people who had the leisure and the hyper-intellectual attitude to indulge in it. Up to the time of Marx and Engels it remained a concern that was narrowly limited to the upper eschelon of society.³

Here, then, were two important "givens" which confronted Marx and Engels as they were developing their system. Religion was purely an intimate, personal affair totally divorced from any active prophetic witness within the historical realities surrounding the believer, and the critique of religion was a preoccupation of the elite intelligensia whose views remained uncommunicated to the uneducated masses. In the forthcoming discussion of the main elements of the Marxist polemic against religion it will become evident that much of the critique was drawn up in opposition to these particular realities within the historical setting.

The task of pinpointing the essential elements of the Marxist "No!" to religion is not an easy one. For, despite

³Jean Lacroix, The Meaning of Modern Atheism, trans. Garret Barden (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 18.

Marx's statement that the beginning of all criticism is religious criticism, at no time did Marx or Engels produce a single, comprehensive, systematic treatise on religion. Nonetheless, an analysis of certain aspects of various writings reveals their irrevocable stand against religion as well as the rationale for this criticism. At the outset, the Marxist theory regarding the origin and fundamental basis, the nature and purpose, and the future of religion can be isolated.

According to this theory there are two principal stages which mark the origin of religion. The initial stage, as Engels asserts in his essay on Feuerbach, came at a time when man was a primitive being confronted by the awesome forces in nature. The gods first came into being through man's personification of these natural forces.⁴ Later in this same essay he restates this thought: "Religion arose in very primitive times from erroneous, primitive conceptions of men about their own nature and external nature surrounding them".⁵ This was the stage when, as Marx and Engels jointly assert, man created a "natural religion" out of his growing consciousness of nature "as a completely

⁴ Frederick Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, Little Marx Library, D.P. Dutt (ed.) (New York: International Publishers, 1941), p. 20.

⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

alien, all-powerful, and unassailable force."⁶ Thus, the first period in the origin of religion is described by primitive man's fear of the forces in nature and his personification of these forces in order to gain some control of them and to influence them through propitiation.

The second stage in the origin of religion is explicitly characterized by Engels in his writing Anti-Dühring. He speaks of the moment when "side by side with the forces of nature, social forces begin to be active; forces which present themselves to man as equally extraneous and at first equally inexplicable, dominating them with the same apparent necessity as the forces of nature themselves."⁷ The social forces to which Engels refers are those which emerged with the birth of private property. The inception of private ownership ushered in a set of social and economic forces fraught with terrors and disasters with which the mass of mankind had to contend. Religion continued to offer man relief from his plight, but now it was rooted in a response to social evils; it helped man to bear his strife under a condition of economic exploitation. Lenin has carried forth this very explanation of the second stage in the origin of

⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Excerpts from The German Ideology," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Basic Writings on Politics & Philosophy, Lewis S. Feuer (ed.) (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 252.

⁷ As quoted in Charles J. McFadden, The Philosophy of Communism (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1939), p. 122.

religion in his writings:

The roots of modern religion are deeply imbedded in the social oppression of the working masses, and in their apparently complete helplessness before the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour cause a thousand times more horrible suffering and torture for ordinary working folk than are caused by exceptional events such as wars, earthquakes, etc. "Fear created the gods." Fear of the blind force of capital -- blind because its action cannot be foreseen by the masses --- a force which at every step in life threatens the worker and the small business man with "sudden", "unexpected", "accidental", destruction and ruin, bringing in their train beggary, pauperism, prostitution, and deaths from starvation -- this is THE "tap-root" of modern religion.⁸

There are three essential strains of thought throughout these various references to the origin of religion. First, there is a cause-effect relationship between fear and religion. Religion was spawned by man's fear of the natural forces encompassing him. Gradually, it began to feed upon man's fear more and more as additional forces of a socio-economic nature came into play. From the very beginning, religion has fulfilled the psychological necessity to bring order and peace to man's chaotic and threatening existence. Second, the forces which have played the most prominent role in history and which have constantly called forth man's fear are of a socio-economic nature. Religion is not, therefore, an independent phenomenon. Rather, it is

⁸V.I. Lenin, Religion, Little Lenin Library, vol. 7 (New York: International Publishers, 1933), pp. 14-15.

merely one of the ideological superstructures built on the socio-economic basis of the history of a given people. Third, religion has remained what it was at its origin -- a psycho-social phenomenon. It is psychological by virtue of the fact that it is "nothing but the reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."⁹ It is sociological by virtue of the fact that it is a response to the socio-economic factors in the human conditions.

In the classical Marxist polemic religion has had one nature and purpose throughout history. Religion represents a form of escape, a flight away from the concrete world into the abstract. Its nature and purpose are one, and they are crisply defined in Marx's famous phrase: "It (religion) is the opium of the people."¹⁰ This definition fits hand in glove with the understanding Marx and Engels have of the origin and fundamental basis of religion. For if religion arises out of man's fear of the natural or sociological forces surrounding him then its function is to help man to cope with these forces and his fear of them. It does so by producing a world of illusions to which he can flee for

⁹F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, as quoted in McFadden, op. cit., p. 122.

¹⁰Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", On Religion, Marx and Engels, op. cit., p. 42.

refuge. Like a narcotic drug, it allays sensibility and relieves pain, and it produces a euphoric sensation which frees man from the irritation of reality. With such an affirmation Marx stresses once more and with greater force than ever before the psychological and sociological nature of religion. He spares no words in making this point crystal clear. He drives home his point by saying that religion "is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation."¹¹ Faced with social and economic injustices, man takes refuge in religious beliefs which give him in return a sigh of relief, a heart of hope, and a spirit of joy. In the same context, Marx characterizes religion as the "spiritual aroma" of the "other world."¹² Such graphic statements leave no doubt about the psychological escape from earthly conditions and fears which religion affords.

But there is more to the substance of this opium phrase. As an opiate, religion prevents man from taking any corrective action with respect to the ills of his condition; it produces temporary release from the evils and injustices, and it promises an ultimate escape in the bliss of an after-life. It, therefore, dopes man into accepting his condition without protest. Religion thus acts as a solid buttress

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

for the structures of a given social order. Specifically, during the period when Marx and Engels lived, it justified the existence of the inequality of wealth and the suppression of the masses of poor people. For as Lenin pointed out later, religion teaches those who live on the labor of others to be charitable, "thus providing a cheap justification for their whole exploiting existence and selling them at a reasonable price tickets to heavenly bliss."¹³ Furthermore, Lenin asserts, religion counsels those who work endlessly in a state of poverty to be patient and resigned and thereby "consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven."¹⁴

Marx's most explicit statement of the ways in which religion is the opium of the people is contained in his article "The Communism of the Paper 'Rheinischer Beobachter'", in which he attacks the social principles of Christianity. In particular, he affirms the evil effect of the dogma of original sin and redemption.

The social principles of Christianity declare all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be either the just punishment of original sin and other sins or trials that the Lord in his infinite wisdom imposes on those redeemed.¹⁵

He goes on to say that these principles have justified

¹³ Lenin, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ On Religion, op. cit., p. 84.

slavery in ancient times, serfdom in the Middle Ages, and the oppression of the proletariat in present times. Above all, they preach humility, cowardice, and abasement at the very moment in history when the proletariat needs its pride, courage, and self-esteem. The point that Marx is stressing throughout this article, as well as in many of his statements against religion, is explicitly clear: religion, and Christianity in particular, divorces man from historical reality by providing him with an illusory release from the socio-economic tensions and forces in life. By dint of its narcotic nature and purpose, it can do nothing to alter the conditions of this life; it can only be a temporary psychological flight from reality. This means that, in the end, it serves as a blanket endorsement of the socio-economic conditions in history. In short, religion is the "halo"
¹⁶ which sits atop the vale of woe in history.

The classical Marxist treatment of the future of religion is identical to its view of the future of the other elements of the superstructure built on the socio-economic base of history. That is, if religion is fundamentally an outgrowth of the socio-economic factors in life, and if Christianity in particular has served the purpose of justifying the oppression of the proletariat, then this stultifying by-product will be eliminated through a transformation of the

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Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", On Religion, op. cit., p. 42.

socio-economic order into a classless society. Specifically, religion will vanish through the abolition of the system of private property and its resulting economic exploitation -- the system from which religion has grown and to which it lends its endorsement. Neither Marx nor Engels advocate any explicit action to be taken against religion in order to effect its elimination. They merely affirm the theory of its future abolition. This theory is stated most concisely by Engels as follows:

When society, by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are now held by these means of production which they themselves have produced but which now confront them as an irresistible extraneous force; ... only then will the last extraneous force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect.¹⁷

In short, the socio-economic forces which dominate men and cause them to flee into the abstract will gradually disappear as a result of the proletariat revolution. Religion, like the other elements of the superstructure, will no longer exist, having withered away, when the final period in history emerges.

The foregoing discussion has isolated part of the essential substance of the classical Marxist critique of religion. There still remains the task of characterizing the basic

¹⁷ F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, as quoted in MacFadden, op. cit., p. 129.

rationale underlying this polemic. The principal reasons which undergirded this attack begin to emerge when it is noted that the original Marxist stance on this subject was fashioned in opposition to the two all-important "givens" in Marx's time: 1) the private, unprophetic, sentimentalized nature of religion, and 2) the aristocratic and highly intellectual setting of atheism.

The assertions which Marx and Engels made about the origin and fundamental basis as well as the nature and purpose of religion were directed primarily against the first of these two realities. Actually, they were to a large degree criticisms of the facts of the historical situation. Religion was basically a private matter of feeling, and since it did not spawn any active witness which extended into the structures of society, it did serve as a passive supporter of the status quo. As Denis de Rougemont has stated in describing the religious tenor of the age, "Religion seemed no longer to incommod[e] anyone."¹⁸ Marx and Engels as well were calling into question a situation that has often occurred in the history of religions, wherein the believer finds comfortable refuge in the sanctuary of his faith. And in their time the members of society, whether of high or low estate, who fled to this sanctuary were in effect doping themselves, as if with opium, in order to avoid the

¹⁸ Denis de Rougemont, "Shall Life or Man Be Changed?", Communism and Christians, trans. J.F. Scanlan, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1949), p. 233.

harshness of historical realities. In short, Marx and Engels were pointing out the perplexing irony of their historical situation --- religion, and in particular Christianity, was primarily a psychological response to the forces of injustice within the socio-economic order, and yet it was a response which was geared toward a withdrawal from these realities. In other words, religion was a symptom of an illness, and at the same time it tried to flee from society's sickness. Since it was a reaction of avoidance and withdrawal, it impeded the cure of society's ills.

The statements by Marx and Engels about the future of religion reflect their opposition to the second of these "givens" in their age. They predicted that the death of religion would occur eventually through the gradual transformation of the socio-economic base of society. In other words, Communism would attack religion at its source: the injustices within the mode of production. It was to be an attack on the illness, not the symptom of it. This kind of polemical action against religion was in direct opposition to the type of atheism that had existed prior and up to their time. Before, there had been an aristocratic and intellectual atheism; now, there was to be a more democratic and political attack on religion. That is,
¹⁹ the assault on religion could no longer be solely an

¹⁹ Lacroix, op. cit., p. 18.

intellectual concern of a minority circle of elite scholars. If atheism were to remain in this realm, it would never be communicated to the level of the common man, and it would never be effective in altering the social conditions of the masses --- the very structures of injustice and economic exploitation in which religion found its basis and to which religion gave its support. Thus far, the intellectual atheism of the French and German philosophers had not been utilized for social change. On these grounds, Marx makes one of his most forceful criticisms of Feuerbach, and with him most of the contemporary philosophers: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point however, is to change the world."²⁰

In these ways, therefore, the essential substance of the Marxist critique of religion was aimed at these two "givens" of the day. As such a voice of opposition, it was geared toward the Marxist program of social change. The people of the world had to be awakened from their religious stupor. They had to be enlightened about the true nature of religion and the way in which it, with its psychosocial basis, impeded social change. They had to be told that "man makes religion, religion does not make man."²¹ In this sense, the rationale underlying the critique of

²⁰ Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", On Religion, op. cit., p. 72.

²¹ Ibid., "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", p. 41.

religion was of a purely practical nature. The proletariat would not rise as a formative, revolutionary force within society without first realizing their freedom from bondage to religious illusion. Moreover, man could not begin to better his condition by merely carrying out an intellectual attack on religion. Atheism had to be carried to the level of the common man who faced first-hand the conditions which spawn religious feelings and beliefs and which religion in turn endorses. These conditions, and not arguments for the existence of God, must be the object of the anti-religious attack. This rationale of practicality is stated most succinctly by Marx as follows: "The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe,
²²
the halo of which is religion."

When Marx and Engels said "No!" to religion, they meant "No!" first and foremost to the psycho-social basis and nature of religion. They were opposing the way in which religion precluded attempts at social change. They were rejecting the socio-economic conditions and forces within society which undergirded religion. They fashioned this unequivocal polemic for primarily practical purposes. As long as socio-economic conditions continued to exist which cause man to flee into the realm of religious illusion and as long as religion continued to endorse the status quo, no effective change in man's social condition would occur.

²² Ibid., p. 42.

CHAPTER TWO

The Philosophical Context
Of the Marxist "No!"

It would be naive to assume that the whole of the Marxist "No!" to religion has been covered once its fundamental psycho-social nature and its corresponding importance as a tactical manuever has been understood. If such an assumption were valid, then one could further assume that the antipathy of Communists toward Christians would be eliminated simply if the social and political efforts of Christian believers were less wedded to the established socio-economic order and more in tune with "the direction of history." These assumptions are directly challenged by Ignace Lepp, a Catholic convert from Marxism. On the basis of his understanding of the Marxist movement in history and from his personal experience as a participant in this movement, he asserts that Marxists have been generally more hostile toward progressive Christians, whose social and political views are sympathetic toward, if not compatible with, their own than they have been toward more reactionary Christians.¹

If the truth of Lepp's assertion is overlooked, then the polemic of Marx and Engels against religion is misrepresented. It is of utmost importance to realize that the essential kernel of their critique resides within its psycho-social nature and its practical rationale. However, it is equally important at the same time to recognize the

¹ Ignace Lepp, Atheism in Our Time, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 70.

philosophical context surrounding this kernel. For the classical Marxist polemic is more than a mere criticism of a defective kind of religion, that is, religion as an outgrowth of and a buttress to socio-economic forces. It stands as an unequivocal refutation of religion in any form regardless of its social principles. In other words, Marx and Engels were speaking not only against the private, sentimentalized, and unprophetic Christianity in Western Europe during the 19th century but also against the validity of any form of religion at all. It is precisely because their polemic extended beyond a psycho-social critique of strategic importance that many of their followers have vehemently denounced even those Christians who hold respectable social views (respectable to a Marxist).

It is necessary, therefore, to clarify the comprehensive nature of the scope of the Marxist "No!" to religion. On what basis did Marx and Engels make a categorical denial of anything having to do with religion? In other words, what was the philosophical content of their critique?

At the outset, one point must be made patently clear. It has been noted earlier that while Marx considered religious criticism as the beginning of all criticism, neither he nor Engels ever wrote a single, comprehensive treatise on religion. Now it must be recognized in addition that despite their unequivocal denial of the validity of all religious thought and practice, they never articulated their sweeping polemic in a systematic, philosophical critique.

The reason that they never engaged their critique on this level is that when they said "No!" to religion, they were not dealing with it primarily as a philosophical problem. It was not their explicit interest to debate the nature of ultimate truth or to refute a religious viewpoint from a specific philosophical perspective. As the preceding chapter has noted, their primary interest was a practical matter of revolutionary action, and in keeping with this basic interest, they pushed theoretical questions to the side in their critique of religion and dealt instead with religion as it impeded social change. Therefore, in this very important sense, it is improper to ask about the philosophical content of the Marxist "No!".

However, the matter cannot, of course, be dismissed so readily. For the basis on which Marx and Engels made their categorical denial of religion is philosophical as well as psycho-social. Such is the case in two particular respects: 1) Their critique was based upon the insights of an important philosophical legacy in Germany; 2) Their critique drew unquestionable support from the system of thought they constructed. The forthcoming discussion will deal with these two points as the philosophical context surrounding the Marxist "No!" to religion rather than as the philosophical content of the critique. This distinction is more than a mere semantic question. It is drawn in order to emphasize that while the Marxist "No!" has a significant philosophical basis and support, Marx and Engels did not reject religion with a critique that was fundamentally philosophical.

The Young Hegelian Legacy

Marx began one of his most significant essays by saying, "For Germany the criticism of religion is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all ² criticism." This statement more than any other helps to place Marx's views on religion in their proper relationship to the philosophical legacy at his disposal. It reveals Marx's conviction that the recent work of German scholars had completed the critique of religion on the philosophical level. Any further philosophical critique was unnecessary. The nature of the philosophical argument against religion in Germany just prior to the formative period in Marx's thought must be examined so that the Marxist "No!" may be viewed in its proper perspective.

In this respect, the type of thinking generated by those known as the Young Hegelians is of specific importance. The peak of Hegel's influence in Germany came during the 1830's and 1840's. Very soon after his death in 1831, the Hegelian school split into an orthodox and a liberal group. The former -- represented by Michelet, Haym, Erdmann, Fisher, and Rosenkranz (among others) -- were concerned with elaborating the conservative trends in Hegel's system, particularly the Logic, Metaphysic, and the Philosophies of Right and of

² Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", On Religion, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), p. 41.

Religion. The latter -- known as the Young Hegelians and represented chiefly by Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and Feuerbach -- developed the critical tendencies in Hegel. It is difficult to generalize about the thought of the Young Hegelians. They should not be considered a school of philosophers, for they produced no consistent system of thought. However, they did reveal a common interest -- the interpretation of religion. While pursuing this interest, they set in motion a critique of religion which had a strong bearing on the thought of Marx and Engels.

These left-wing students of Hegel began to question the compatibility of his thought with religion in general and with Christianity in particular. In effect, Hegel had brought theology and philosophy into a very close relationship, if not an identical one. Further, he had made Christianity into the symbolic expression of his own Absolute Idealism and therefore considered Christianity as the absolute religion.³ The Young Hegelians brought their critical minds to bear on these views. The questions they were raising -- the issues which led them to a critique of religion -- have been characterized as follows:

... is God to be identified with an eternally subsistent Dialectic or with that Dialectic incarnate in humanity, ultimately in a rationally organized society? Is the Incarnation

³ John Herman Randall, Jr., "From the German Enlightenment to the Age of Darwin", The Career of Philosophy, vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 341.

of God in Man achieved once for all in the Christ, or does it await fulfillment in humanity? Most abstractedly, is the Essence of Reason already embodied in Existence, or is present Existence still incompletely rational, still striving for that Essence to acquire full self-consciousness?⁴

The Young Hegelians' criticism of religion first found public expression with D.F. Strauss' Life of Jesus, published in 1835. In this work his stated purpose was "to investigate the internal grounds of credibility in relation to each detail given in the Gospels and to test the probability and improbability of their being the production of eye-witnesses,⁵ or of competently informed writers."⁶ Two particularly significant results emerged from his study. First, he concluded that the Gospel accounts could not be taken as historical fact; they were myths created from the myth-making consciousness of the Christian community reared in the tradition of the Old Testament. He asserted, therefore, that the dogmas of Christianity had no literal or factual basis in history. Nonetheless, he agreed with Hegel that Christianity was the most adequate and intelligible symbol of the ideal truths of philosophy. The importance of this conclusion in Strauss' work was that despite the symbolic value he attributed to Christian dogma, he interpreted

⁴ Ibid., p. 358.

⁵ David F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, trans. George Eliot, 6th edition (London, 1913), p. 70.

⁶ Sidney Hook, From Hegel to Marx (New York: The Humanities Press, 1958), p. 82.

Christianity as ideology, that is, as the product of a particular historical and mental environment. Second, Strauss placed a decidedly humanistic emphasis on his interpretation of Christianity which posed a social challenge. He held that Christianity had overcome the metaphysical dualism between the divine and the human spirit, and he criticized the Church's teachings to the contrary.

If reality is ascribed to the idea of the unity of the divine and human nature, is this equivalent to the admission that this unity must actually have been once manifested, as it never had been, and never more will be in one individual? ... Is not the idea of unity of the divine and human natures a real one in a far higher sense, when I regard the whole race of mankind as its realization, than when I single out one man as such a realization? Is not an incarnation of God from eternity a truer one than incarnation limited to a particular point in time?

The social challenge issuing from this humanistic interpretation received expression in his other writings; in essence it was a call for a realization of the divine life on earth.

The earth is no longer a vale of tears through which we journey towards a goal existing in a future heaven. The treasures of divine life are to be realized here and now, for every moment of our earthly life pulses within the womb of the divine.⁸

Bruno Bauer's work carried Strauss' thought one step further. A Christian could accept Strauss for, in effect,

⁷Strauss, op. cit., pp. 77-80.

⁸David F. Strauss, Die Christliche Glaubenslehre, vol. I. (Thuringen, 1840), p. 68, as quoted and translated in Randall, op. cit., p. 91.

he was merely trying to liberalize Christianity. Bauer, however, offered a more penetrating criticism of Scripture through careful documentary analysis and concluded with a denial of the historicity of Christ. He argued that the Gospel accounts were not independent sources; John, Matthew, and Luke borrowed from and distorted Mark's account. Furthermore, the one original report, the only "eye-witness" version (Mark), is filled with inconsistencies which destroy its credibility. In his Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker he concluded as follows:

In the prophecy as well as in the fulfillment, the Messiah was only an ideal product of religious consciousness. As an actually given individual he never existed.⁹

The implication of Bauer's work was far more devastating than that of Strauss. As Hook states, now that the historical justification of Christianity was exploded, nothing was left but "a critical method and the free spirit which was to wield that method against the reign of religious principles in every branch of culture."¹⁰

Despite this atheistic attitude, Bauer did not espouse social activism. Such was not in keeping with his view of the task of the pure critic: "The true and pure critic

⁹ Bruno Bauer, Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker, vol. III. p. 14, as quoted and translated in Hook, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁰ Hook, op. cit., p. 94.

never puts his hand to anything."¹¹ It was his belief that once the dogmas of religion were dissolved by criticism, "The several goods of humanity -- art, science, and the State ... will become finally free and develop without restraint."¹² In an ongoing process, history will take over where the pure critic stops.

The high point in the Young Hegelians' religious criticism came with the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, particularly with the publication in 1841 of The Essence of Christianity. In this book Feuerbach revealed a complete reversal of Hegel's method. Hegel's system was based on the methodological presupposition that man's 'being' is explained by his 'knowing', that existence is deduced from essence. Feuerbach turned this proposition on its head. In the preface to the second edition of his book he explains this reversal as follows:

... it (the principle of this philosophy) recognizes as the true thing, not the thing as it is an object of the abstract reason, but as it is an object of the real, complete man, and hence as it is itself a real complete thing. This philosophy does not rest on an Understanding per se, on an absolute, nameless understanding, belonging one knows not to whom, but on the understanding of man.¹³

¹¹Bauer, Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung, Heft 11-12, p. 44, as quoted and translated in Hook, op. cit., p. 95.

¹²Bauer, Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Gelegenheit, p. 203, as quoted and translated in Randall, op. cit., p. 363.

¹³Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), p. xxv.

Actually, Feuerbach's methodology stood in direct opposition to all speculative philosophy, not merely Hegel's system. The principle of his philosophy was not an abstract, purely conceptual being (such as the Substance of Spinoza, the ego of Kant and Fichte, the Absolute Identity of Schelling, and the Absolute Mind of Hegel) but a real being --- the Ens realissimum: man. His principle, as he states, "generates thought from the opposite of thought,¹⁴ from Matter, from existence, from the senses...". Another way of looking at Feuerbach's methodological reversal is to contrast his guiding principle with that of Descartes. Descartes operated on the principle "Cogito, ergo sum", while Feuerbach proclaimed "Sentio, ergo sum". Sensory experience, not logic or reason, was the criterion of existence.

Cogito, ergo sum? No! Sentio, ergo sum. Feeling only is my existence; thinking is my non-existence, the negation of my individuality, the positing of the species; reason is the annihilation of personality.¹⁵

As a result of this significant reversal, Feuerbach used a critical, genetic method of inquiry to probe sensory experience for the roots of the whole of human culture. With an analysis of religious phenomena as specifically illustrated by Christianity, he stated that the objects of worship and

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., Appendix 4, p. 285.

devotion in religion are man's projections of his own image. Operating on the proposition that "the object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken objectively,"¹⁶ he asserts that consciousness of God is self-consciousness and that knowledge of God is self-knowledge. Throughout the historical progress of religion man has not been directly aware of this identity; however, every advance in religion has brought about greater self-knowledge. Now, Feuerbach believes, is the time for a further advance in religion wherein man can understand that the divine-human antithesis is completely illusory and that "the divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective."¹⁷ With this advance, a religion of humanity is to emerge. Feuerbach wanted man to understand the importance of his theistic beliefs -- to understand that he has created God in his own image and that he must strive to fulfill his own nature which he has heretofore projected upon God.

When Marx proclaimed that for Germany the criticism of religion was in the main complete, he was referring to the critique put forth by these Young Hegelians. While he was not in total agreement with the views of his contemporaries,

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 14.

he nonetheless endorsed the trend developed in their thought. Their critique had undermined the philosophical, theological, and historical basis of religion. They had broken down the divine-human antithesis to the point where Feuerbach proclaimed that God really is man and that man makes religion -- religion does not make man. This trend toward the apotheosis of man was fully supported by Marx. But his interest extended beyond the critique of the Young Hegelians. He desired to fulfill the social implications of their thought. Strauss had merely called for social change. Bauer had opted out of social activism and left the practical fulfillment of his critique to the course of history. Feuerbach too merely called man to fulfill his own nature. With this nearly complete religious critique at his disposal, Marx's primary task was to translate their humanism into practical, revolutionary action. In this respect, Marx and Engels built their critique upon the philosophical insights of their immediate contemporaries --- the Young Hegelians.

The Internal Support

In addition to being an extension of the religious critique already in progress in Germany at the time, the classical Marxist "No!" to religion was buttressed by the system of thought which Marx and Engels themselves developed. In this regard, the way in which they both endorsed and criticized Feuerbach's views is particularly significant.

Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity had an immediate

impact upon them. They greeted its publication with overwhelming enthusiasm. Engels writes that at once they became Feuerbachians. ¹⁸ They rejoiced over Feuerbach's methodological presuppositions and the way he reversed the Hegelian dialectic. Engels reports that the Young Hegelians' critique of religion had begun to raise serious challenges to the Hegelian system which were not resolved until Feuerbach published his work. What was the proper view of nature? Were the Young Hegelians correct in their tendency to regard nature as the sole reality? Or was nature to be viewed as the "alienation" of the absolute Idea, as Hegel maintained? Hegel's idealism was being attacked by his followers' trend toward materialism, but the issue was not settled until Feuerbach's book appeared. Then, as Engels states, "The spell was broken." ¹⁹

With one blow it (The Essence of Christianity) pulverized the contradiction (between idealism and materialism), in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence.²⁰

¹⁸ Frederick Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy, Little Marx Library, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1941), p. 18.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

The foundation stones for their system were clearly laid.

But Marx and Engels did not stop with an enthusiastic, general endorsement of Feuerbach's work. As Engels writes, the fact that Feuerbach broke through the Hegelian system and discarded it was not enough: "... a philosophy is not disposed of by the mere assertion that it is false."²¹ The enormous influence of Hegelian thought on the Prussian state was such that a theoretical refutation of the philosophy could not change matters. The call that Engels clearly heard was one for practical change.

²² Marx's Theses on Feuerbach sounded this call. He criticizes Feuerbach for not grasping the significance of "revolutionary" or "practical-critical" activity (Thesis I). He judges Feuerbach for not realizing that once the religious world has been dissolved into its secular basis, "The chief thing still remains to be done (Thesis IV)." The "chief thing" is to change the secular basis. Finally, he rings down the famous call of Thesis XI: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

Marx's criticisms of Feuerbach grew out of a particular point at which he parted company with Feuerbach's thought. He found Feuerbach's philosophy guilty of abstractions which

²¹ Ibid., p. 19.

²² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Religion, op. cit., pp. 69-72.

tended toward the very idealism he was discarding. Specifically, though Feuerbach uncovered the secular basis of the religious world, he nonetheless abstracted the sensory world from its social basis and in doing so, he abstracted man from his social context. Religious feeling is not an abstraction; it is a social product (Thesis VII). Further, the human essence is not an abstraction inherent in each individual; it is "the ensemble of the social relations (Thesis VI)." He clearly spells out the practical implications of this difference of views in Thesis IV:

... the fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is really only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of the secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction, and then revolutionized in practice by the removal of the contradiction. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice.²³

To summarize, Feuerbach sought the secret of religion in a general anthropology which Marx considered a false abstraction. Marx based the religious feeling in a concrete social context, thereby reducing religion to sociology and laying the philosophical foundation for his psycho-social critique.

It is not necessary to analyse closely the specifics of

²³ Ibid., p. 70.

the thought of Marx and Engels in order to pinpoint further the degree to which the Marxist "No!" to religion is buttressed by philosophical presuppositions. A brief discussion of their materialistic analysis of reality and their interpretation of history will suffice. In keeping with the philosophical tradition of materialism, they asserted the primacy of nature to spirit, of being to thinking. Yet their orientation differed from the materialism of the 18th century. The classical French materialism of the preceding century was predominantly mechanical. Marx and Engels considered this mode of thinking a severe limitation in the light of the advances that had recently occurred in the natural sciences. Now, as Engels states, natural science was no longer a collecting science, a science of finished things; it had developed into a classifying science which investigated the origin and development of these things as well as the interconnection of natural processes.²⁴ Therefore, the universe could no longer be considered a mechanistic phenomenon in keeping with the former view. Marx and Engels thus updated the form materialistic outlook in order to account for the newly discovered predominant element of process in the universe.

In specific terms, they developed a dialectical understanding of materialism by picking up the cue from Feuerbach's

²⁴ Engels, op. cit., p. 46.

inversion of the Hegelian method. Their interest in doing so was to root dialectical movement not in the realm of ideas, but in real phenomena. They thereby viewed concepts materialistically --- "as images of real things instead of regarding the real things as images of this or that stage of development of the absolute concept (as Hegel maintained)." ²⁵ The dialectic of the concept of the Absolute which Hegel had propounded was therefore viewed as a reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world.

In essence, what Marx and Engels did was to utilize the Hegelian dialectical method as a means of revising the materialistic tradition and placing materialism more in line with recent scientific advances. Toward this end they were not actually turning Hegel's dialectic upside down. Rather, as Engels writes, they were turning it off its head, on which it had been standing, and placing it "on its feet." ²⁶ Hegel had uncovered a useful philosophical method, but because of his idealism he had not been able to see the intricate relationship between the general laws of motion within the external world and the laws of process and development within human thought. They stressed this shortcoming in Hegel's thought by transferring the dialectical

²⁵ Ibid., p. 44

²⁶ Ibid.

method from idealism to materialism, thereby explaining man's 'knowing' by his 'being', instead of, as with Hegel,²⁷ his 'being' by his 'knowing.'

The degree to which these philosophical presuppositions supported the Marxist critique of religion can be seen most clearly by the view of history which Marx and Engels developed from this base. As a result of their inversion of the Hegelian dialectic, it was no longer possible to regard history in Hegel's terms as the gradual development and manifestation of the Absolute. Since the dialectic is achieved by real phenomena, the essence of history does not reside in the abstract, in the realm of ideas. Since one cannot explain practice from the idea, the reverse procedure must be employed in order to understand history. It is a misreading of history to say that it is determined by man's ideas or motives. Marx and Engels look beyond religious or political motives to ascertain their origin in material practice. It is in the material realm that the dialectic operates; herein lies the real driving force in history. On this basis, they develop their famous economic interpretation of history, defined succinctly by Engels in the following statement:

(Historical materialism is) that view of the course of history, which seeks the ultimate

²⁷ Frederick Engels, Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, Little Marx Library (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 52.

cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another.²⁸

This analysis of reality and this view of history left no room at all for the validity of religion in any form. Abstract supernatural concepts, a religious sentiment in man, religious forces in history --- all are unequivocally negated by Marx and Engels. A person who affirms them is dealing with illusions by denying the materialistic way in which the dialectic operates in history.

In summary, the Marxist critique of religion cannot be viewed adequately unless proper consideration is given to its philosophical context. When Marx and Engels said "No!" to religion, they were not merely negating the validity of the particular form of religion existing in Europe in their time. They were accepting the materialism and the humanism of the Young Hegelians, particularly in the form espoused by Feuerbach, as an adequate theoretical refutation of "the God-idea" and the religious premise of life. They were supported in this regard by the way Strauss and Bauer had undermined the historical basis of Christianity. The critique of religion made by their immediate contemporaries was "in the main complete."

²⁸ Selected Works of Marx and Engels, vol. I (London, 1942), p. 402, as quoted in Henry B. Mayo, Introduction to Marxist Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 63.

The "chief thing" still remained to be done; the theoretical critique of religion begun by the Young Hegelians had to be translated into practice. Toward this end, Marx and Engels developed their system of thought geared toward revolutionary action. To be sure, there were presuppositions in their philosophy which gave further support to their religious critique --- notably dialectical materialism and the economic interpretation of history. However, when they said "No!" to religion, they were not dealing with religion primarily as a philosophical problem --- the Young Hegelians had fairly well completed that task. Their predominant interest was the practical activity of social change. For this reason their "No!" to religion, though supported by philosophical considerations, was essentially psycho-social in nature.

CHAPTER THREE

Bonhoeffer's "No!" to Religion

By writing a particular letter to his friend Eberhard Bethge on April 30, 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer unknowingly set in motion a heated theological controversy throughout Western Christendom -- a debate which shows no signs of lessening even after the passage of over two decades. It was in this letter that he began to articulate his famous critique of religion by making some tentative remarks about "religionless Christianity." In some subsequent letters he attempted to elaborate his critique. However, he found the task to be a most difficult one, not only because of the far-reaching implications of his thought but also because of the unbearable summer heat at the prison where he was confined. At best, he was able to set forth his views in a fragmentary and incomplete form. Among his prison correspondence there is a crude outline of a book designed to bring some of his thought to completion. His untimely death at Flossenbürg on April 9, 1945, just three days before the advancing American army liberated the camp, prevented the fulfillment of his plan.

He was well aware of the controversial nature of the words he was writing for the first time in this letter of April 30. He prefaced his initial comments on "religionless Christianity" by saying to his friend, "You would be surprised and perhaps disturbed if you knew how my ideas on ¹theology are taking shape." What he did not know, of course,

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, (London: SCM Press, Fontana Books, 1959), p. 90.

was that the critique of religion introduced in this letter and continued by brief sketches in subsequent letters would have such a formative influence upon theological developments in the next twenty years and more. The "neo-Nietzscheans" have expanded Bonhoeffer's critique of religion into a full-scale proclamation that "God is dead." Men like van Buren have pursued linguistic analysis in an effort to articulate the Gospel in "non-religious" terms. The World Council of Churches has tried to follow up Bonhoeffer's ideas with a fresh approach to the laity's role in the Church, particularly through the work of H.H. Walz and Hans-Ruedi Weber. Many laymen today -- college students, seminarians, and parishioners alike -- read Bonhoeffer's letters with avid interest.

Fearful apprehension, if not loud opposition, has greeted each of these post-Bonhoeffer developments. The Fundamentalists among the Emory alumni in particular and among Americans in general have denounced the Altizer "Death of God" proclamation, often linking it to a Communist-inspired plot. Others feel that van Buren has profanized the Gospel. Still others, though not as many as in the preceding two cases, are apprehensive about the advisability of expanding the responsibility of the laity. The fact of the matter is that Bonhoeffer's views on religion have sparked a wide-scale debate that still awaits resolution.

The substance of this chapter springs from an important underlying presupposition. That is, much of the complexity

of the ongoing debate stems from a general confusion regarding Bonhoeffer's critique of religion, and often from an improper understanding of it. This situation is not at all surprising, simply because Bonhoeffer wrote so little specifically on the subject. However, there has been an eisegetical tendency in the study of Bonhoeffer, to the extent that, as Harvey Cox points out,² we learn more about the student of Bonhoeffer than we do about Bonhoeffer himself. There is a distinct need for a careful analysis of what Bonhoeffer actually meant when he said "No!" to religion. This chapter is written as an attempt to meet this need, with full recognition that it may fall prey to the same shortcoming of previous study.

In his letter of May 5, 1944, Bonhoeffer states that Karl Barth's "really great merit" is that he was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion.³ In other letters he similarly alluded to his debt to Barth --- specifically those from April 30, 1944, and June 8, 1944. At the outset, it is therefore important to introduce Bonhoeffer's "No!" to religion with an analysis of Barth's critique in order to pinpoint the extent to which Bonhoeffer agreed with and yet departed from Barth.

²Harvey Cox, "Using and Misusing Bonhoeffer," Christianity and Crisis, vol. XXIV, No. 17, October 19, 1964, p. 199 f.

³Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 95.

The Legacy of Karl Barth

It is instructive to begin an investigation of Barth's treatment of the question of religion by noting at the start his sharp criticism of the common way in which religion has been understood by theologians since the Reformation. Such an introduction to the question will place Barth's view in its historical setting as he sees it and will uncover the major thrust of his understanding of religion. He contends that the history of theology in the last two centuries is comprised of variations on one theme, a theme originally rooted in the works of van Til and Buddeus: "that religion has not to be understood in the light of revelation, but ⁴ revelation in the light of religion." Buddeus and van Til propounded the view that human religion has to be understood as something of essential importance for all theological thinking precisely because it constitutes "the presupposition, the criteria, the necessary framework for an understanding of revelation (I/2/289)." As such, human religion "shows us the question which is answered by revealed religion ... (I/2/289)." Barth draws a straight line from van Til and Buddeus; through the so-called Neologists; through Schleiermacher, Strauss, Feuerbach, Ritschl, and Troeltsch; up to the present day exponents of natural theology. Through-

⁴ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I:2, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 291. Additional references to Barth will be noted in the text proper (e.g. I/2/291).

out this straight line he thus delineates what he considers to be a dangerous development in theology which is "a disruption of the life of the Church, and ultimately ... a heresy which destroys it (I/2/291)."

It is clear that Barth characterizes this "heresy" as "the reversal of revelation and religion (I/2/292)," that is, the trend in which revelation is understood in the light of religion, rather than the other way around. With this reversal, theology has engaged in "the very thing which theology must not do (I/2/293)." The theologian began to cooperate in the dominant mood of the 17th and 18th centuries: "the absolutism with which the man of that period made himself the centre and measure and goal of all things (I/2/293)." The catastrophe that resulted was that theology "lost its object: revelation in all of its uniqueness (I/2/294)." The proof of this tragic loss was that the terms theology and religion became practically interchangeable.

By voicing this opposition against this background, Barth reveals his principal underlying attitude toward religion. Religion must never be assigned to an independent sphere which can be defined and assessed as a complete entity in its own right. Religion is an enterprise of man, and just as man can never be granted any existence except as in the possession of Christ, so too religion never, under any circumstances, can be viewed in any way except in the light of, and against the backdrop of, revelation

(I/2/296). There is no alternative other than to accept a priori the superiority of revelation over human religion (I/2/295).

This fundamental attitude sets the stage for Barth's methodology in his treatment of religion. We cannot talk about man and his religion first and then turn to God and revelation in order to coordinate the two. To do so would be to ascribe to man an independent form and existence, thereby denying the central fact of revelation: that Jesus Christ is the Lord of man and that man is His property. Herein lies the failure that Barth finds in much of the "natural theology" that has preceded him. Therefore, to overcome this shortcoming, Barth insists that "we always have to speak about revelation from the outset if we really want to speak about it later and not about something quite different (I/2/296)." He pinpoints this key aspect of his methodology as follows:

... if revelation is not denied but believed, if man and his religion are regarded from the standpoint of those statements in the Catechism, then to take man and his religion seriously we cannot seek them in that form which has already been fixed in advance. There can, therefore, be no question of a systematic co-ordination of God and man, of revelation and religion. For neither in its existence, nor in its relation to the first, can the second be considered, let alone defined, except in the light of the first (I/2/296).

Therefore, methodologically speaking, the theologian should not take a pre-defined concept and understanding of the reality known as religion and then try to bring it into a

systematic, plausible relationship with the theological concepts of revelation or faith. Rather, he should deal with the question that is "uninterruptedly theological (I/2/296)" (which in Barth's terms means to be rooted fundamentally and centrally in revelation). This question is phrased as follows:

What is this thing which from the stand-point of revelation and faith is revealed in the actuality of human life as religion (I/2/297)?

In answer to this question, Barth emphatically states that divine revelation places judgement upon all religion. This judgement is summed up in the affirmation that religion is unbelief, that is is "a concern, indeed ... the one great concern, of godless man (I/2/300)." And this judgement in turn is a part of God's judgement upon everything that is human. Two elements in the revelation attested in Holy Scripture make this judgement clearly manifest.

First, there is the fact of revelation that God offers Himself and manifests Himself and that man has knowledge of God only through His self-disclosure. This is one of the most constantly recurring refrains in Barth's Church Dogmatics. In the context of his critique of religion Barth reiterates it in order to re-emphasize the fact that all of man's attempts on his own to gain knowledge of God are "wholly and entirely futile (I/2/301)." Man does not know this fact until he learns it through divine revelation. He could know God (it is potentially possible, that is) by virtue of

the fact that God is the Lord of man. But this does not mean that he can know God, for such a power of knowledge comes not from man's capability, but solely from God's self-manifestation. Until such a time as God chooses to disclose Himself, man cannot know Him. This "he cannot" is an "absolutely decisive" negation "which can be removed and turned into its opposite only by revelation (I/2/301)."

It is Barth's contention that man does not accept the fact that knowledge of God comes only from Him. We are not "resolved simply to let the truth be told us and therefore to be apprehended by it (I/2/302)." We resist the divine revelation offered to us and replace it by a concept of God constructed by our own means, insight, and energy. Such a construction constitutes religion. And Barth insists that it is created by man out of a condition of unbelief. If man did believe, if he did accept the facts of revelation, he would not try to grasp at truth on his own by his own means. Religion is thus shown by revelation to be a resistance to the truth, a contradiction of revelation, precisely because from the standpoint of revelation it is a function of man's unwillingness to grant that "it is only through truth that truth can come to man (I/2/302)." Sharply defined, it is "the concentrated expression of human unbelief, i.e., an attitude and activity which is directly opposed to faith (I/2/303)."

Barth's stand on this matter is unequivocal. Man has the power to provide a substitute for God's self-disclosure,

and in using this power he not only "bolts and bars himself against revelation" but also creates a "complete fiction (I/2/303)" in the process. For that which he creates on his own is never the truth; it has "not only little but no relation to God (italics added) (I/2/303)." In short, from the standpoint of revelation, religion is an "anti-God (I/2/303)." As substantiation for this contention Barth cites the prophetic Biblical opposition to idolatry. His stance is particularly vehement in his comments on certain speeches in Acts 14 and 17:

If God is the Creator, how can there be such a thing as a mediation which we ourselves establish? How impossible all these things are! And yet how real is the struggle against the grace of revelation in favour of a capricious and arbitrary attempt to storm heaven (I/2/306).

Barth's contention is clear -- that man "steps out in a bold bid for truth, creating the Deity in his own image (I/2/315)."

The second element in Biblical revelation which leads Barth to judge religion as unbelief is the fact that man's justification and sanctification are God's gift in grace. Without such divine assistance man is "unable to help himself either in whole or in part (I/2/307)." He can neither declare his own righteousness nor work for his own salvation. God in Christ replaces all human efforts at justification and sanctification; he "completely outbids these attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong (I/2/308)."

Again, from the standpoint of this fact of revelation, religion is seen to be the contradiction of revelation.

Religion is man's attempt on his own to achieve justification and sanctification. As such, it is a function of man's unbelief, for it is an activity which displays total disregard for the Lordship of Christ. Man's faith is not the "stringent obedience (I/2/312)" described in the New Testament; rather, it is rooted in a confidence in his own self-determination. This confidence, this self-righteousness, and this preoccupation with works -- all that man utilizes on his own through religion to achieve justification -- is condemned and abolished by the New Testament revelation. The New Testament throughout is "the proclamation of the justifying and sanctifying grace of God (I/2/312)."

To summarize: Barth attempts to ascertain the nature of religion from the standpoint of revelation and in so doing, he articulates the judgement that religion is unbelief. He substantiates this judgement by citing the two prime ways in which religion contradicts revelation: through idolatry and self-righteousness. What emerges is an unequivocal critique of religion aimed principally at the arrogance and false piety of the person who thinks he can gain knowledge of God on his own and who believes in his ability to work for his own justification. It should be noted that this critique is not at all new to the Christian faith, for it has an abiding legacy in the Biblical prophetic tradition.

One final element in Barth's understanding of religion must be mentioned. He asks whether we can ever speak of

"true" religion. He answers that we can do so "only in the sense in which we speak of a 'justified sinner' (I/2/325)." In the foregoing discussion we have noted Barth's insistence that revelation is the only truth and that religion is a contradiction to revelation -- an unbelief, an un-truth. As such, religion can become "true" in the same way in which man is justified, from without and by grace. Revelation abolishes religion through the unequivocal judgment that it brings to bear upon it. But revelation can also adopt religion, sanctify it, and "mark it off as true religion (I/2/326)." This can and does happen, most emphatically so, in the Christian religion when it is rooted in strict faith in God and radical obedience to His revelation in Christ. The Christian religion is "marked off" as the one "true" religion in so far as it is based upon and lives by the grace of God in Christ. With this understanding of "true religion", Barth displays once again his major pre-occupation with the distinction between religion as a human activity and faith as an event in man's life rooted in the revelation of God.

Since Bonhoeffer's theological schooling was strongly influenced by Barth's thought, it is not surprising that his "No!" to religion is in large part an outgrowth of Barth's critique. There are at least four specific instances of agreement between Barth and Bonhoeffer on the question of religion. First, just as Barth finds fault with the "natural" theologians for thinking that religion

occupies an independent realm in human life, so too Bonhoeffer criticizes these "liberal" theologians for clearing a space for religion either in the world or against the world.⁵ Second, Bonhoeffer praises Barth for acknowledging that divine revelation places all religion under judgement; he states that Barth's "greatest service" was that he "called the God of Jesus Christ into the lists against religion."⁶ Third, Bonhoeffer agrees with Barth that religion opposes divine revelation by assuming idolatrous characteristics. One of the reasons for his criticism of the current form of Christian apologetic is that rather than affirming the reality of Christ at the center of life, it turns the Christian message into "a human law", a man-made solution to the problems and distresses in life.⁷ Fourth, Bonhoeffer agrees with Barth's critique of religion as man's attempt to secure his own justification; in two letters -- those of April 30, 1944, and June 8, 1944, he draws a parallel with St. Paul's treatment of the circumcision question and in doing so, he

⁵ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 109.

⁶ Ibid., cf. Reginald H. Fuller, "The World Come of Age: A Second Look at Bonhoeffer," Conflicting Images of Man, ed. William Nicholls (New York: The Seabury Press, 1966), p. 141. Barth had started in the right direction in his Romerbrief; the "positivist doctrine of revelation" (see Note 8) later put forth in the Church Dogmatics side-tracked Barth, according to Bonhoeffer.

⁷ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 108. cf. p. 114.

denounces the way in which religion becomes the pre-condition of faith and salvation. In these four instances Bonhoeffer is in agreement with Barth that religion is a human creation which stands in opposition to divine revelation and faith.

However, it is clear that at the same time Bonhoeffer strongly opposes Barth for not carrying his thought to its necessary conclusion. He pinpoints this criticism in the letter of April 30, when he states that Barth "has arrived at a positivism of revelation which has nevertheless re-⁸ mained essentially a restoration." In two subsequent letters he makes a similar reference to the fault of Barth's "positivist doctrine of revelation."⁹ By "positivism" he means the mere positing or proclamation of revelation without reference to its relation to a man's life in the modern world. What Barth has done, in effect, is to make the truths of revelation into sheer creedal requirements; his final word to modern man is, "Take it or leave it."¹⁰

According to Bonhoeffer, Barth started in the right direction by separating faith and revelation from religion, but he never carried through his thought to the point where the truths of revelation are explained in their relation

⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

⁹ Ibid., p. 95 and p. 109.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

11 to man. Instead, with his emphasis on the free contingency of God, he left man with no guidance in the matter of understanding God's immanent relation to the world. He assigned revelation to a transcendent sphere and elevated the Christian faith to the position of the "true" religion. In this sense, his positivism of revelation, while set forth in opposition to religion, actually turned into a "restoration" of religion.

To summarize: Barth and Bonhoeffer agree that religion is the concern of godless man. They differ in the way they proceed from this analysis. Barth treated revelation's judgement upon religion as a part of God's judgement upon everything that is human and therefore posited God's revelation in Christ as a truth set over and against man and the world. Bonhoeffer, however, considered this positivist doctrine of revelation to be, in the last analysis, "a law of faith ... mutilating what is, by the 12 incarnation of Christ, a gift for us." Rather than establishing the Christian faith as the "true" religion as Barth had done, Bonhoeffer desired to pursue an entirely different

11 It must be noted, however, that Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth might have softened in the light of some of Barth's later work written after Bonhoeffer's death. cf. Church Dogmatics III:4 and The Humanity of God (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960). Notice should also be made of Barth's response to Bonhoeffer in Church Dogmatics IV:3 (pp. 18-40) and The Humanity of God (pp. 58-59).

12 Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 95.

question: "... what ^{is} Christianity, and indeed what ^{is} Christ for us today?"¹³ His interest was to articulate the important missing element in Barth's thought at that time -- the immanent relation of God to modern man. On the basis of this interest, he asked whether faith in Christ has anything at all to do with religion.

Analysis of the Letters

Bonhoeffer's critique of religion was fashioned, therefore, from the standpoint of the primary question in his mind -- who is Christ for us today? He never gave a systematic treatment of this critique; his letters merely provide the kernel of his thought. Even so, the elements of this kernel appear only in fragmentary sketches as the initial stages of his thought unfold in his correspondence. In an effort to uncover the essential meaning of Bonhoeffer's "No!", the forthcoming discussion will provide a brief analysis of the important letters pertaining to this subject.

The letter of April 30, 1944¹⁴, sets up Bonhoeffer's

¹³ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 90-93. Unless otherwise noted, all of the following references come from the Fontana Books publication of the Letters. Only the page references of the entire content of each letter will be noted since the different publications are often ordered differently.

initial, tentative remarks on religion. The historical context of his remarks is highly significant; he was conscious of the events that were about to occur in the world outside the prison and the important consequences they might have on lives everywhere. He was aware that the plot to kill Hitler was coming to a head, that the Russians were advancing from the East, and that the Allies were planning to land on the European mainland. ¹⁵ He writes that he is certain the "God is about to do something which we can only accept with wonder and amazement." At this moment which Bonhoeffer believes to be filled with prophetic meaning, he is driven to a careful assessment of his own thinking in the light of world events. In this setting he opens up the question of who Christ is for the modern world, and this matter leads him to ponder whether the time of "religion as such" is over. He believes that modern man has "more or less" reached the stage of being without religion, that "we are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all." This belief arises, again, from the immediate historical situation. For if religion really is not vanishing, why has there been no "religious" reaction to the war?

Much of this letter is written in the form of questions. Bonhoeffer is beginning to ask whether the a priori "religious

¹⁵ Fuller, op. cit., p. 140.

premise" in man, which has always played such a large role in Christian preaching and theology, is merely "a historical and temporary form of human self-expression." And if so, does the present stage in history mark its end? And further, if it does, "what does that mean for 'Christianity'?" He speculates that such an end of the "religious premise" in man would mean the removal of the "linchpin" in the structure of Christianity to date. He continues his tentative thoughts by presenting the questions which would demand answers in a definition of Christianity without religion. These questions lay the groundwork for his later call for a non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts.

In addition, within this letter Bonhoeffer gives some strong clues regarding the meaning he attaches to the word religion. First, there are two specific references to religion as "inwardness." Second, he parallels the word with "metaphysics": "the 'beyond' of God is not the beyond of our perceptive faculties." Third, when he asks in what sense Christians are "religionless", or "people wholly belonging to the world", he implies that religion has an other-worldly meaning. Fourth, he explicitly links the deus ex machina concept with religion:

Religious people speak of God when human perception is ... at an end, or human resources fail: it is in fact always the Deus ex machina they call to their aid, either for the so-called solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure -- always, that is to say, helping out human weakness or on the borders of human existence.

Although this letter is nothing more than a rough beginning, it clearly reveals Bonhoeffer's interest in pursuing the subject. He has begun to say "No!" to religion in the interest of speaking of God "not on the borders of life but at its centre," "of talking of Him as "the 'beyond' in the midst of our life." He closes by promising Bethge he will write soon about the outward form of religionless Christianity.

¹⁶

On May 5, 1944, Bonhoeffer begins to pick up the subject of religionlessness from a different standpoint. He criticizes Bultmann for not going far enough in his demythologizing of the New Testament. While he grants that the problematic mythological conceptions of the New Testament need a new articulation, he insists that the interpretation of the "religious" concepts of God and faith must not be left untouched in the process, as he feels Bultmann has done. The concepts of God and faith have to be interpreted in a "non-religious sense." Having stated this, he then proceeds to define the phrase "interpret in a religious sense" as follows:

In my view, that means to speak on the one hand metaphysically, and on the other individualistically.

What does he mean by the individualism of religion? Apparently, he means the individual's concern for the salvation of his own soul. Religion, he contends, has no

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

Biblical basis. He can find no evidence of such a concern in the faith of the Israelites, and he regards Romans 3:14ff. as a complete refutation of an individualistic doctrine of salvation. He then adds a refrain to the previous letter's idea of "God in the midst of life" by stating that it is not with the next world that we are to be concerned, but with this world, the world that is the focus of the Bible -- in the creation and in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. A criticism of Barth's positivist doctrine of revelation follows quite naturally at this point. He ends with a promise to continue at a later date with the whole question of the non-religious interpretation of concepts such as justification, repentance, and faith. It is important to note here the new definition he gives to this type of interpretation; it is reinterpreting Biblical concepts "in the manner 'of the world'." In doing so, he re-emphasizes the point that religion deals with the other world.

17

In the letter of May 20, 1944, Bonhoeffer makes a point which, although incidental to the subject he has been pursuing, is quite relevant. He speaks poetically of man's love of God being "a kind of cantus firmus to which the other melodies of life (man's earthly affections) provide the counterpoint." Whatever man does in the act of loving God (and it would appear that Bonhoeffer is including worship,

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

prayer, and the "secret discipline" he later mentions) gives life a certain polyphonic wholeness. Man's love of God does not provide an escape from life. Once again, Bonhoeffer seems to be stressing the this-worldliness of the Christian faith as opposed to the other-worldliness of religion.

The day after Bonhoeffer wrote this letter, his grand-nephew was baptized, and on this occasion he addressed a ¹⁸ rather remarkable document to his young relative. In this letter he gives another indication of the impact that the important events of the day are having upon his theology. The German people and the Church are standing on the brink of a revolution; readjustment, though difficult, will be necessary. Toward the end of the letter he draws a clear analogy between the baptism of his grand-nephew and the re-baptism that must occur in the Church: "...we too are being driven back to first principles." This comment precisely defines the new direction his theological study is taking with his "No!" to religion.

¹⁹ On May 24, 1944, Bonhoeffer remarks to Bethge that he ²⁰ has been reading Weizsäcker's book with great interest and that he expects it to be fruitful for his current theological

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 154-160.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

²⁰ C.F. von Weizsäcker, The World View of Physics, (University of Chicago Press, 1952).

21

study. In the letter written on the following day he relates that this book has convinced him of "how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge." Under the impact of Weizsäcker's study of the physical picture of the world, Bonhoeffer spells out in more precise fashion the criticism of the deus ex machina concept of religion, which he began on April 30:

We should find God in what we do know, not in what we don't; not in outstanding problems, but in those we have already solved. This is true not only for the relation between Christianity and science, but also for wider human problems such as guilt, suffering and death. It is possible nowadays to find answers to these problems which leave God right out of the picture. It just isn't true to say that Christianity alone has the answers ... Once more, God cannot be used as a stop-gap.

The time of the stop-gap God of religion is gone. Now is the time to proclaim God's presence where He always has been -- at the center of life. Near the end of this letter Bonhoeffer restates the Christological focus of his "No!" to religion. He began on April 30 by asking what Christ is for man today. Now he answers that "Christ is the centre of life, and in no sense did he come to answer our unsolved problems." Bonhoeffer is compelled to say "No!" to the stop-gap God of religion because of the revelation of God in Christ.

22

In the letter of June 8, 1944, he gives even greater

21 Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 103.

22 Ibid., pp. 106-111.

precision to his "No!" to religion's stop-gap, problem-solving God by introducing the famous phrase "die mündige Welt," the adult world or the world come of age. Elaborating the insight gained from Weizsäcker's book, he proclaims that the movement which started with medieval secularism has now reached "a certain completion," to the extent that man "has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis."

The way Bonhoeffer uses this concept of the world's adulthood must be examined carefully, for it is on this subject that a misunderstanding of his thought often occurs. The concept has a very restricted application in this letter; it relates solely to an historical observation that the world no longer needs the stop-gap God of religion. ²³ Nowhere does Bonhoeffer imply that man has become ethically or culturally mature. Nor does he ascribe to the Liberal theologians' view of progress. Nor does he bless the world in its present form. Rather, he introduces the concept as a means of criticizing the stop-gap God of religion, particularly as that "God" is proclaimed in contemporary Christian apologetic. This apologetic is strongly polemical toward the world's increasing autonomy and self-assurance, and it treats this trend as "the great defection from God." It thus attempts to persuade the world that it needs God.

²³ cf. Fuller, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

He parallels this type of persuasion with that of the existentialist philosophers and the psychotherapists, "who demonstrate to secure, contented, happy mankind that it is really unhappy and desperate, and merely unwilling to realize that it is in severe straits it knows nothing at all about, from which only they can rescue it." However, these apologists are not proclaiming God at the center of life; rather, they are proclaiming a stop-gap deity who is brought in at the boundaries of life, at the moments of death, guilt, and despair. This apologetic is, therefore, "like an attempt to put a grown-up man back into adolescence." He completes his attack on the current apologists with a brief historical view of modern Christian apologetic, sweeping through Heim, Althaus, Tillich, Barth, the Confessing Church, and Bultmann.

His major emphasis throughout this letter is a plea for recognition of the present world situation as it is and a criticism of the attempt (through the proclamation of the stop-gap, problem-solving God) to make the world otherwise before the gospel can be preached to it. It would appear that with this letter, Bonhoeffer's thought has begun to crystallize much more. Yet he still is proceeding tentatively, well aware of the import of the questions he is raising. At the end of the letter he asks whether the Church has any use once the stop-gap God of religion is abolished. He also wonders whether the apologetic method which he criticizes was not in fact used

by Jesus -- did he not use distress as his point of contact with man?

The letter of June 21, 1944, makes passing reference to the "No!" to religion which has been occupying Bonhoeffer's mind. He tells Bethge that he has been reading an "outstanding" book by W.F. Otto on the Greek gods. ²⁴ ²⁵ He relates the impact of this book as follows:

To quote from his closing words, it is about "this world of faith, which sprang from the wealth and depth of human experience, rather than from its cares and longings." ... I find something attractive in this theme and the way it is treated in this book. In fact, I find these gods --horribile dictu -- less offensive when treated like this than certain brands of Christianity! I believe I could pretty nearly claim these gods for Christ. This book is most helpful for my present theological reflections.

Bonhoeffer implies that the insights of Otto's book have helped him to continue his criticism of religion as an individualistic, problem-solving pursuit divorced from the reality of God at the center of human existence.

²⁶ On June 27, 1944, Bonhoeffer's correspondence with Bethge reopens the subject previously treated on May 5, the protest against religion as a concern for the salvation of one's soul and a release from this world. Specifically, he is criticizing Christianity understood in these terms.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 110-111.

²⁵ Walter F. Otto, The Homeric Gods, trans. Moses Hadas, (Boston: Beacon Press Paperback, 1964).

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 111-113.

It is a cardinal error to regard Christianity as a religion of salvation and to divorce Christ from the Old Testament by interpreting him in the light of salvation myths. He defines salvation in the religious sense (cf. the May 5 letter) as "salvation from cares and need, from fears and longing, from sin and death into a better world beyond the grave (italics added)." This sort of religious salvation is not the distinctive feature of the Old Testament, which speaks of historical redemption, that is, "redemption on this side of death":

Israel is redeemed out of Egypt in order to live before God on earth.

Nor is salvation in the religious sense a central feature of the Gospels and St. Paul:

The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and a mythological hope is that the Christian hope sends a man back to life on earth in a wholly new way which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament.

What Bonhoeffer is attempting in this letter is to give a non-religious interpretation of the Biblical concept of salvation. In doing so, he is further defining what he means by such an interpretation. On May 5, he implied that a non-religious interpretation operates "in the manner 'of the world'." Now he strongly implies that "of the world" means according to the reality of Christ in the world. Once again, he recalls the crucial question from which his critique of religion arises -- the Christological one. It is the reality of Christ in the world which compels Bonhoeffer to

say "No!" to religion, and it is this reality which forms the basis of the non-religious interpretation.

The important substance of the letter of June 30,
²⁷
1944, stems directly from the issues raised on June 8. He hardens his criticism of the use of the deus ex machina concept in Christian apologetic. By using the former parallel between Christian apologetic and existential philosophy and psychotherapy, he protests against the clever way this apologetic pushes people to despair and then brings God in as the solution. His argument stings and bites:

If however it (the apologists' method) does not come off, if a man won't see that his happiness is really damnation, his health sickness, his vigour and vitality despair; if he won't call them what they are, the theologian is at his wits' end. He must be a hardened sinner of a particularly vicious type. If not, he is a case of bourgeois complacency, and the one is as far from salvation as the other.

Bonhoeffer contends with this type of apologetics and polemics because it flies in the face of the way Jesus operated. He did not first make a man a sinner before blessing him. Rather, he called him out of his preoccupation with sin, not into it. Returning to his closing question of June 8, he affirms that Jesus did make contact with men in their distress, but at the same time he gives equal emphasis to the fact that Jesus never cast doubt on health, vigor, or fortune, regarded in themselves.

²⁷

Ibid., pp. 113-116.

Jesus claims for himself and the kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations (italics added).

At the close of this letter Bonhoeffer characterizes the present form of the Christological concern that has been central throughout his critique of religion: "... how can we claim for Christ a world which has come of age?" It would appear that he is on the verge of a detailed description of the non-religious interpretation.

However, the next letter on the subject, written on ²⁸ July 8, 1944, offers only "a few preliminary observations" which merely reiterate former thoughts. Christian apologists and psychotherapists are criticized again. He calls their work "religious blackmail." He denounces the way the clergy "snuffs around in the sins of men in order to catch them out." Although stating a common theme of his here, Bonhoeffer adds a new dimension to this particular protest. This type of apologetic not only is dependent upon the religious deus ex machina concept but also is based upon the religious concept of inwardness (to which he alluded on April 30). The apologists assume that man's essential nature is defined as his "interior life" and they therefore claim the inner aspects of man as God's realm. Bonhoeffer strongly criticizes this inner-outer distinction, pointing out that the Bible is concerned with anthropos teleios, the whole man, and not just the inner self: "The 'heart'

²⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

in the biblical sense is not the inward life, but the whole man in relation to God."

Once again, Bonhoeffer is trying to proclaim God at the center of life and not just in some secret place at life's edge. At the end of the letter he obviously is convinced of the necessity to work out this attempt. He admits to Bethge that it is "high time I said something concrete on the worldly interpretation of the terminology of the Bible." Unfortunately, the heat of the day is too unbearable for him to continue writing.

²⁹

A week later, on July 16, 1944, Bonhoeffer relates that the non-religious interpretation is a far bigger job than he can manage at the moment. Therefore, rather than attacking this major problem, he adds some further thoughts on the history of the world's coming of age (the historical perspective first introduced on June 8). In a very brief survey of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Montaigne, Bodin, Machiavelli, Descartes, Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, and Feuerbach he argues that in one field of study after another it has become no longer necessary to have recourse to God as a "working hypothesis." The large measure of autonomy which the world has gained in morals, politics, and science is valid etsi deus non daretur -- "even if there is no God." The God that Bonhoeffer refers to here

²⁹

Ibid., pp. 119-122.

is the stop-gap deity of religion.

Given this historical assessment, what are Christians to do today? This is the first time that Bonhoeffer opens up the ethical question. He answers that they have to live before the true God, abandoning the stop-gap God, the deus ex machina. He states this reply in a seemingly paradoxical way:

God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him ... The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8.17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps, but by his weakness and suffering.

This passage remains a confusing paradox unless it is understood that Bonhoeffer is talking about two different Gods -- the God of Biblical faith and the God of religion. The God of Biblical faith is a powerless and suffering God (the Christological emphasis is made patently clear); he helps man from this condition of weakness. The God of religion, on the other hand, works from a position of strength as the powerful working hypothesis and problem-solver. The God of Biblical faith is telling man that he can live without the religious God: "... the only way to be honest is to recognize that we live in the world etsi deus (ex machina) non daretur." The significance of this historical reality

of the death of the deus ex machina is summarized as follows:

To this extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God, and a clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible, who conquers power and space in the world by his weakness. This must be the starting point for our "worldly" interpretation.

Bonhoeffer's "No!" to religion keeps bringing him back to his primary Christological concern; his "No!" to religion and its God develops more and more into a "Yes!" to the true God as revealed in Christ.

Bonhoeffer's correspondence written on July 18, 1944,³⁰ precisely underlines this substance of the previous letter. He states that to speak of God in a non-religious way means to expose the ungodliness of the world in a new light. The world come of age is more godless (i.e., without the deus ex machina), "and perhaps it is for that very reason nearer to God (as revealed in Christ) than ever before."

Earlier in this same letter, Bonhoeffer addresses himself to the ethical question that had been raised two days before. How is the Christian to act in the world come of age? His answer begins with the weakness of God in the cross. The Christian must participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world. His thinking, though still solidly based on the Christological concern, is not clearly anti-

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 122-124.

culated at this point; yet it is clear that he is saying "No!" to religion in a particular way. That is, the Christian must not be religious in the sense of cultivating a particular form of asceticism. Such a religious act is always something "partial," divorced from the wholeness of life. The term religion is used here to indicate a separate province of life (cf. inwardness of April 30 and July 8.) Bonhoeffer says "No!" to religion in this sense because "Jesus does not call men to a new religion (a part of life), but to life (in its wholeness)."

He pursues the ethical question further on July 21, 31 1944. First, he reiterates the thought of the previous letter. That is, sharing God's suffering in the world must not be made into an ascetic cult:

One must abandon every attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, a converted sinner, a churchman (the priestly type, so-called!) a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one.

This protest against making the cross an abstract principle is repeated on July 28, 1944, ³² when he criticizes Kierkegaard. Second, he tries to spell out what "participation in the suffering of God" means, defining it as "... worldliness--taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failure, its experiences and help-

³¹ Ibid., pp. 124-125.

³² Ibid., pp. 126-127.

lessness."

It is in these later letters, in which Bonhoeffer shifts away from historical questions and interpretative problems and begins to consider the ethical question, that his thinking is particularly inchoate. It is clear that his perennial Christological focus has been carried into this ethical discussion, but its exact meaning and its relationship to what he has already said against religion is missing. However, Bonhoeffer's last recorded word on the critique of religion, the "Outline for a Book,"³³ does help to bring his thought somewhat more into focus.

Chapter III deals with the ethical consequences of his religionless theology. The Church is no longer to be a self-perpetuating establishment. She is her true self "only when she exists for humanity." As the first step to the realization of her true nature, the Church should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. In addition, the clergy should live solely on free-offerings from their congregations; perhaps they should take a secular job as well. These practical suggestions grow out of the Christology proclaimed in Chapter II. Christ is the one whose sole concern is for others. To have faith in Christ is to participate in the concern of Christ. The material in this outline links Bonhoeffer's ethical discussion to his earlier

³³ Ibid., pp. 163-166. This "Outline" was sent to Bethge on August 3, 1944.

articulation of his "No!" to religion by giving greater precision to his focal theme of Christology. When he turns to the ethical action of the religionless Christian, his "No!" to religion becomes even louder as he explicates the command to follow the example of Christ, the man who exists for others. The religious Christian does not exist for others; he turns to the stop-gap God for his own salvation and for the solution to his own problems.

Summary:

The meaning of Bonhoeffer's "No!" to religion must be viewed in the context of Barth's religious critique. Barth had made a criticism of religion which had a profound impact on Bonhoeffer's thought. It was Barth who convinced Bonhoeffer that faith and religion are separate, and that the God of Jesus Christ has to be brought into the lists against religion. However, Bonhoeffer found a danger in Barth's thought; namely, his "positivist doctrine of revelation" lacked an articulation of the immanent relation of God to modern man, and it led him to a restoration of religion with the affirmation that Christianity is the "true" religion.

Bonhoeffer, therefore, wanted to bring the God of Jesus Christ into the lists in a way which would overcome the serious shortcoming in Barth's thought. The urgency of this desire became particularly acute under the impact of the current revolutionary events in history which signaled

not only the breaking down of old social structures but also the near completion of the autonomy and self-assurance of the world.

In the process of assessing the historical situation in the light of his central Christological consideration (who is Christ for us today?), Bonhoeffer gradually formulated a "No!" to religion which went well beyond the scope of Barth's critique. The essence of his "No!" may be summarized as follows. When he rejected religion, he was denouncing what he considered to be a historical and temporary form of human self-expression which has displayed certain specific characteristics. Religion is a separate province of life marked by inwardness, metaphysical thinking, other-worldliness, an individualistic concern for salvation as a release from this life, and a belief in a deus ex machina: the stop-gap, problem-solving God. It is this latter characteristic that Bonhoeffer rejects most forcefully. In fact, in his mind, the other religious features often stem from this conception of God. It is true that Bonhoeffer's "No!" to religion issues forth the proclamation "God is dead," but in a very restricted sense: the stop-gap God of religion, the "working hypothesis" God, is dead. Similarly, his rejection of the a priori "religious premise" in man is stated in a specific way. This a priori premise is no longer valid because it has been based upon the conviction that man needs a powerful, problem-solving God, a working hypothesis, and this God of religion is now dead.

Herein lies the kernel of Bonhoeffer's "No!"

This critique was fashioned in the light of the focal question of Christology. Bonhoeffer said "No!" to religion because of his conviction that the reality of the world is not separate from the reality of Christ. Christ was the man for others, and as such, his importance is to be viewed solely in a this-worldly perspective. To deny this is to deny the central fact of God's revelation in creation and in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. This is the crux of Bonhoeffer's argument -- religion expresses this denial. Thus, the reality of God in Christ in the world compels Bonhoeffer to say "No!" to religion, and at the same time it becomes the basis of the non-religious interpretation of Christianity and the Bible. In the final analysis, Bonhoeffer says "No!" to the God of religion by saying "Yes!" to the reality of God in Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The preceding three chapters have been attempts to isolate the essential ingredients of the "No!" to religion proclaimed separately by Marx and Engels and by Bonhoeffer. The present task is to point out the degree to which their two critiques are in agreement and, in the light of this convergence of views, to articulate the important bearing that this combined study has upon the critical question of dialogue among Communists and Christians. A specific, detailed course for dialogue will not be outlined; such a focus is not included in the scope of this particular study. Rather, the ultimate goal of the concluding chapter is to show how this combined analysis of the classical Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!" sets the stage for fruitful Communist-Christian dialogue.

At the outset, two points must be emphasized. First, it would be a gross oversight not to acknowledge that classical Marxism has undergone significant changes since Marx and Engels originally propounded their system of thought geared toward social change. Second, it would be equally naive to assume that Bonhoeffer's views are not only clearly understood but also readily accepted throughout the entire Christian community. On the basis of these two admissions, it could rightly be asked how the classical Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!", two viewpoints which are neither widely nor consistently maintained today among the respective Communist and Christian communities, can be of significant value for dialogue among these peoples. This ques-

tion touches upon the basic underlying presupposition of this chapter. That is, in order for fruitful dialogue to occur among these two "enemy" camps, both parties first have to assess the essential elements of their respective positions. For the Marxists, this means that they must evaluate their present dogmatic atheism in the context of the original Marxist "No!", as articulated in Chapters I and II. For the Christians, this means that they must assess their present brands of dogmatic theism in the light of Bonhoeffer's "No!", as spelled out in Chapter III. Only through such assessment of the fundamental aspects of their positions can each of the parties enter into genuine dialogue.

Points of Convergence

There are at least three points at which the two critiques of religion are in close agreement. First, both critiques maintain that religion is merely a temporary stage of human development and that the present moment in history marks the end of this form of human self-expression. Of course, since a full century separates the two critiques, there is a discrepancy about the exact time when the old age of religion actually closed. Yet it is significant to note that to a certain extent Bonhoeffer corroborates the Marxist view with his discussion of the historical process by which the world has matured to the point where religion is no longer necessary or valid. Marx and Engels

believed that religion's validity had been fairly well annihilated by their time, theoretically at least, and that the practical necessity for religion would follow suit and completely vanish in time, once man had learned to control and to alter the social forces which give birth to religion. Bonhoeffer asserted that man's autonomy was such that his need to flee the world into the realm of religion was very nearly abolished.

Second, both critiques hold similar views about the nature and function of religion. Marx and Engels considered religion as a form of escape from the distresses of the world, a flight from the concrete into the refuge of abstract illusions. Their critique was fashioned in part in opposition to the private, unprophetic, and sentimentalized piety which was prevalent in their time. Although Bonhoeffer did not specifically characterize the nature of the distresses as socio-economic (as Marx and Engels did), he nonetheless made it abundantly clear that religion feeds upon these problems and anxieties and provides a solution for them and a release from them. This emphasis, of course, rests at the heart of his criticism of the religious deus ex machina, who rescues man in the "boundary conditions" in life. It is echoed in the objections he raises against the religious yearning for salvation in a world beyond the grave. Furthermore, the same psycho-social nature of religion is criticized by Bonhoeffer when he denounces the "religious blackmail" of the existential philosophers and the psychotherapists.

Third, both critiques oppose the way religion functions as a buttress to the given socio-economic conditions and a deterrent to social change. The Marxist "No!" denounced the way in which the private, inward, and other-worldly concerns of religion sanction the class struggle and the oppression of the proletariat. Bonhoeffer also opposed the privacy, inwardness, and other-worldliness of religion, and he indirectly noted a similar tendency in religion as such to stifle social change when he articulated the ethical concern of non-religious Christianity. He suggested that the Church has to exist for humanity and toward this end, she should give away her endowments to the poor and needy, and the clergy should live on free-will offerings and even take secular jobs. By strong inference, he was stating that the Church with a religious focus on individualism and supernatural concerns has not fulfilled its social obligations at all.

In these three respects, the Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!" display striking similarities as psycho-social critiques of religion. In fact, it appears that Bonhoeffer's psycho-social critique differs only insofar as he does not place the roots of religion specifically in the forces within the socio-economic order. Otherwise, they seem to be practically of one mind on this subject. Marx and Engels made their critique for the practical purpose of freeing man to be an agent of social change in the world. By fashioning a similar critique, Bonhoeffer's thought (and indeed his life

as well) has an ultimate ethical thrust which forces Christians "to take with theological seriousness the problem of speaking up, breaking the silence, leading, serving, getting hurt in the passionate social and political issues of the day."¹ Indeed, the fact of the matter is that both of these critiques oppose religion in order to place man squarely in the world as responsible, creative agents. And to reiterate the first point, both sounded their respective death-knells over religion on the basis of their belief that religion was not part of the permanent condition of man and that, in fact, man was now passing into another phase in his development when this temporary condition would no longer be necessary or valid.

To the degree that both critiques have this common psycho-social nature, they reject the "religious premise" in man in a similar fashion, although they approach this matter from different perspectives. Taking his cue from Feuerbach, Marx based the religious feeling in a concrete, social context, thereby reducing religion to sociology and undermining its validity as an independent function of the human spirit. Religious feeling, in the sense of an awareness of the mysterium tremendum, is an illusion which man contrives in order to find a refuge from and a solution to the pain and distress of life on earth. Bonhoeffer took

¹William Hamilton, "Bonhoeffer: Christology and Ethic United," Christianity and Crisis, vol. XXIV, No. 17, October 19, 1964, p. 199.

his cue from Barth and made a sharp distinction between religion and faith. Yet despite the way his orientation to the question differed from that of Marx, he agreed that there is no validity to religious experience. He too rejected the notion that religion is an inherent, independent function of man's spirit. He insisted that religion has been a temporary, historical form of human self-expression characterized by the concept of the deus ex machina who solves man's problems and assuages his pain on earth. Because Bonhoeffer planted the roots of the Christian's faith in the God revealed in Christ in the world, he rejected the validity of the religious experience of a deus ex machina who comes from the mysterium tremendum to resolve man's dilemmas. Thus, the Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!" reach a similar conclusion regarding the "religious premise" in man; they undermine the experiential validity of religious feelings.

However, it is immediately necessary to qualify this affirmation with the utmost precision. The two critiques make a similar rejection of the "religious premise" only to the degree that they have the common psycho-social nature described in the above three points. They undermine the experiential validity of religious feelings because they are only a temporary form of human self-expression that is now passing away, because they lead man to flee from the world into the realm of abstract illusions, and because they stifle man's creative and responsible action in the

world. Yet the very fact that the two critiques reach this similar conclusion from different perspectives must not be overlooked, for herein lies the central difference between the Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!". Marx and Engels fashioned their psycho-social critique against the background of a significant philosophical context -- the philosophical atheism of the Young Hegelians and the dialectical and historical materialism of their own system. As a result, when they said "No!" to religion, they were rejecting not only the experiential validity of religious feelings but also the cognitive validity of any "God-idea" as well. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, built his psycho-social critique in the context of a significant theological legacy -- Karl Barth's critique of religion with its important distinctions between religion and revelation and between religion and faith. As a result, when he said "No!" to religion, he was repudiating religion defined in a specific sense -- the feelings and the concepts surrounding a particular "God-idea": the deus ex machina. He did so in order to uncover the God of the Bible, to draw man away from his dependence on the stop-gap God, and to proclaim the validity of man's faith in the "worldly" God revealed in Christ. The essence of his "No!" to religion is a resounding "Yes!" to Christ. The distinction between the two critiques lies precisely in this fact: the philosophical context of the Marxist "No!" repudiates the validity of faith as proclaimed by Bonhoeffer

because it rejects the cognitive validity of any "God-idea."

The Prospects for Dialogue

Because of this central difference between the Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!", it would appear that to point out the similarities between these two psycho-social critiques of religion does not yield any lasting possibilities for fruitful dialogue between Communists and Christians. Would not all attempts for discussion ultimately fall apart over this point of difference? What would prevent the response of even stronger hostility which Marxists usually make toward progressive Christians who are more "in tune with history"? Would not the Christian who responds to Bonhoeffer's call for a religionless life of creative and responsible service to mankind be treated with intense enmity by the Marxist because he still holds a belief in Christ which has no cognitive validity in the Marxist's eyes? A realistic appraisal of the predominant attitudes today would probably yield an affirmative answer to these questions.

However, the findings of this study point the way to a different reply. The central point emerging from the analysis of the original Marxist "No!" to religion is that while it was surrounded by an important philosophical context, it was first and foremost a psycho-social critique of practical and strategic significance. In Chapter II the words philosophical context were used instead of philosophical

content in order to emphasize this point. In saying "No!" to religion, Marx and Engels were not explicitly preoccupied with a debate about the nature of ultimate reality or with a refutation of religion from a specific philosophical perspective. Their primary interest, despite their philosophical heritage and their own philosophical presuppositions, was the practical activity of social change. When they attacked religion, they did not approach it directly with philosophical arguments; rather, they directed their time and energy to what they considered to be the real disease, the roots of religion: the structures of social injustice and economic exploitation. They believed that under the brunt of such an indirect attack religion would die a natural death. The dogmatic, philosophical atheism which the Marxists of today tend to proclaim when confronted by progressive Christians was not centrally present in the religious critique of Marx and Engels.

If, therefore, the type of dogmatic atheism which contemporary Marxists usually proclaim is absent from the classical Marxist "No!" to religion, it would seem valid to assume that it has developed since the time when Marx and Engels originally presented their religious critique. This, in fact, is what has occurred. What Marx and Engels intended in their philosophical presuppositions to be a method of inquiry into social, political, and economic questions geared toward social change has become for their followers a total explanation for all possible questions.

The history of Marxism subsequent to the writings of Marx and Engels reveals an increasing tendency toward dogmatization through which members of this movement have claimed possession of the entire truth. It is this "quasi-religious" postulate of absolute truth which Karl Jaspers considers the source of the fanaticism which Marxism has developed.² Helmut Gollwitzer, the noted German theologian, has described the effect that this process of dogmatization has had on the religious critique of Marxists as the "ideologizing of materialism into a closed system of atheistic metaphysics."³ It is his thesis that the Marxist "No!" to religion has been elevated to a closed, dogmatic form because when Marxism became increasingly aligned with a "messianic" will, it became necessary for Marxists "to overcome the intellectual vacuum of existence without God."⁴ His viewpoint is corroborated by the many non-Marxist writers who have characterized the growth of Marxism as a religion, particularly those who consider the movement a "Christian heresy."⁵ The importance of the views of Jaspers, Gollwitzer,

²Karl Jaspers, Way to Wisdom, trans. Ralph Manheim, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 156.

³Helmut Gollwitzer, The Demands of Freedom, trans. Robert W. Fenn, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 145.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Stephen Neill presents a succinct summary of this viewpoint in his book, Christian Faith and Other Faiths (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 154-155.

and others lies not so much in their specific substance as in the general way in which they point to the historical fact of a successive dogmatization of the original Marxist views.

This historical fact, therefore, presents a vitally important consideration for contemporary Marxists and Christians to debate. The original Marxist "No!" to religion had a significant philosophical context which, when taken dogmatically, repudiates faith as conceived by Bonhoeffer. However, the content of the original critique was psychosocial in nature; it was geared toward practical action and was not centrally concerned with a debate over the nature of ultimate truth. Subsequently, what was at first the philosophical context of the Marxist "No!" has become the focal issue in the present content of the religious critique. The vital question that emerges is as follows: Is the dogmatic, philosophical atheism of the present-day Marxists an essential and valid component of their critique of religion? The analysis within this particular study of the classical Marxist "No!" points toward a negative answer. In this regard, it is significant to note the few indications in the current "feelers" for Christian-Communist dialogue that this very question is being raised with the same answer being given. Gollwitzer not only propounds this view but also reports that "there are already Marxists and Marxist groups today that are uninterested in the

6

metaphysical dogma of atheism." Milan Opocensky, the systematic theologian at the Comenius Faculty in Prague, also asserts his conviction that metaphysical atheism ⁷ does not belong to the substance of Marxism.

A debate over this issue is of particular importance because unless and until it occurs, the deadlock between Communists and Christians will remain unchanged. The rigid dogmatization of the philosophical presuppositions of Marx and Engels "sacrifices discussion" (to use E. B. ⁸ Koenker's term) because it roots the Marxist critique of religion in 19th century judgements of Christianity which fail to recognize the theological and sociological changes that are now beginning to take place in the church both in the West and in the East. To stress these judgements through the ideologizing of their original philosophical context forecloses debate over the significant points of convergence between the psycho-social critiques presented by Marx and Engels and by Bonhoeffer.

Thus far the discussion about the prospects for dialogue has dealt with the critical question that confronts the current dogmatic atheism of the Marxists. Turning to the

⁶Gollwitzer, op. cit., p. 139.

⁷Milan Opocensky, "Christian Existence in a Communist Country," Dialog, vol. 2, no. 3, Summer 1963, p. 223. For a slight variant on this view see Marcel Reding, "Marxism without Atheism?", Commonweal, vol. LXXXII, no. 7, May 7, 1965, pp. 216-218.

⁸Ernest B. Koenker, Secular Salvations (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 134.

Christian camp, there is an equally important question facing their dogmatic theism. Bonhoeffer's "No!" forces Christians to realize that religion (as he defines it) is not an essential and valid component of their faith. Students of Bonhoeffer tend to displace this central challenge in his critique in favor of a debate over whether the time for religion is really over, that is, whether Bonhoeffer's historical assessment of the "world come of age" is valid. However, whether or not the time of religion has passed is not the essential question that Bonhoeffer poses. Rather, he is proclaiming that a belief in the stop-gap deus ex machina as well as the private, individualistic, other-worldly, and metaphysical concerns and thoughts that accompany this belief are alien to God's revelation in Christ. Further, he demands of Christians who still cling to these religious views and concerns that they abandon them. In short, he challenges Christians to ask whether or not his specific definition of religion (as presented in Chapter III) ⁹ is an essential and valid component of their faith.

The bearing that this question has upon Communist-Christian dialogue is of critical significance. The typical, rigid hostility that Christians express toward Communists is often a defense of religion in the very sense that

⁹For a similar assessment of Bonhoeffer's fundamental challenge see Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, vol. LI, no. 2, February 1961, p. 33.

Bonhoeffer uses the term. The truth of this affirmation is made abundantly clear by Will Herberg's analysis of religion in America. His famous study makes no reference to Bonhoeffer, for it was written before much of Bonhoeffer's writings received wide circulation; nonetheless, his description of religion in America is strikingly similar to the very religion that Bonhoeffer opposes. A few references will suffice as reflections of this agreement in view. The church, Herberg writes, is a kind of "emotional service station to relieve us of our worries."¹⁰ American religion is concerned with "peace of mind," and it makes man "feel real good."¹¹ It "encourages moral insensitivity and social irresponsibility, and cultivates an almost lascivious preoccupation with self."¹² Finally, religion in America has become "the one sure resource for the solution of all national problems."¹³ The close similarity between this sort of faith pictured by Herberg and the pious, individualistic dependence upon the problem-solving, stop-gap God described by Bonhoeffer is indeed striking. It is the final reference just mentioned which is of particular significance

¹⁰ Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, revised edition, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1960), p. 268.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 266.

¹² Ibid., p. 268.

¹³ Ibid., p. 266.

for this discussion. Religion conceived as "the sure resource" for solving national problems is a prime source of anti-Communist feelings among Christians. God provides the answer to personal worries, and in like fashion His name is invoked as the answer to the nation's confrontation with Marxist atheism. The next step is an easy one -- God's blessing upon militant anti-Communism is readily received. The "Holy Crusade" is therefore set in motion. In this sense, the usual animosity that Christians hold toward Communists is a defense of the God of religion in Bonhoeffer's terms rather than the God of the Bible.

Bonhoeffer's "No!" to religion faces this situation with a forceful denouncement. The dogmatic theism of American Christians is described as a distorted and invalid representation of the Biblical God. Unless and until Christians recognize the validity of Bonhoeffer's challenge, they will remain convinced of the absolute rightness of their hostility toward Communism. They will continue to silence discussion in much the same way the Marxists do. Furthermore, they will remain blind to the fact that when their religious beliefs become solid buttresses for the policy of the state, they are exhibiting the very religious tendency to which Marx and Engels were so vehemently opposed.

This study therefore concludes that in order for fruitful dialogue to occur among Communists and Christians, both parties have to assess the essential elements of their respective positions. In Bonhoeffer's phrase, this means "being

driven back to first principles." Such an assessment entails careful scrutiny of two major questions: 1) Is the dogmatic, philosophical atheism of present-day Marxists an essential and valid component of their critique of religion?; and, 2) Is religion in Bonhoeffer's terms an essential and valid ingredient of the Christian faith? This analysis points to a negative answer to both of these questions. This reply obviously necessitates a large alteration in the respective positions of the two parties, but it has the virtue of returning to fundamentals. This answer, in turn, breaks the overall deadlock between the "enemy" camps and opens up the prospect for genuine dialogue on those points where the psycho-social elements of the Marxist "No!" and Bonhoeffer's "No!" converge. At these points a remarkable paradox emerges. Marx and Engels appear to be "religionless" men in Bonhoeffer's sense of the word, and Bonhoeffer appears to be "anti-religious" in the classical Marxist sense. Within this paradox lie the seeds for dialogue.

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